

TESTIMONY
H.B. NO. 5562 AN ACT CONCERNING SPECIAL EDUCATION
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SUPERINTENDENT
UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT

This bill, in the section which creates a three tiered funding schedule for special education excess cost reimbursements, addresses an issue that affects all of Connecticut's school districts. The current eligibility level is 4.5 times the average per pupil cost. Union's per pupil cost of \$13,595 means that our expense for a single special education student must exceed \$61,778 before we can receive a 75% reimbursement on the amount that exceeds our eligibility level. For example, a student's special education program that costs \$65,000 would give us a state excess cost reimbursement of \$2,417.00. The fact is that few students exceed that threshold amount but students with programs in the \$30,000 to \$50,000 range are increasing.

In Union we have seen a marked increase in our special education costs due to new students with extensive programming needs moving into the district. Last year we saw a projected budget surplus virtually disappear. This was followed by a necessary 9% budget increase for the current 2013-14 school year and we are seeking a 5% supplemental budget appropriation to cover services for students who moved in after the budget was adopted. For the 2014-15 school year we are seeking approximately a 14 to 15% increase, largely driven by children entering the district from the birth to three program and elementary level students entering the secondary level with increased needs for special services.

Union is Connecticut's smallest town. Little things happen in a big way here. We are a Connecticut State Department of Education Excelling School District. Our per pupil cost of \$13,595 is very average. The cost of our individual special services is in line with what other districts are paying. The dilemma lies in the convergence entering special needs students and having no students exiting programs or leaving the district.

Our achievement level, small size and the lack of a 40% poverty level severely limit our eligibility level for state grants. Our tax base is extremely limited. Ninety percent of our land area is tax exempt with ownership split between a Yale University Land Conservancy and state-owned forests.

All of Connecticut's children need and should receive the services called for in their individualized educational plans. The State needs to be a partner in supporting local districts financially as they strive to provide appropriate special programs. To date, the vast majority of the costs have been borne locally. H.B. 5562 is a step in the right direction and should be passed in this session.